

First Sunday of Advent – Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

It seems that our first Sunday of Advent continues with the readings on Christ the King, the End of Times. But Pope Francis writes in *Give Us This Day* reflections, "Right during those moments when everything seems to be coming to an end, the Lord comes to save us. We await him with joy, even in the midst of tribulations, during life's crises and the dramatic events of history. We await him."

On the lighter side:

I remember a time when it did seem like the End of Times. It was a warm summer weekday evening when Mom and I would regularly attend adoration at Saint Emmauel's Parish in Dayton, across from Chaminade Julianna High School. Sometimes it can be hot and muggy, like that evening in late summer. Everyone was sleepy from just eating their supper and trying to stay awake during Father's homily, which dragged on and on. All of a sudden, it seemed like the end of the world was happening then and there right in the church. Half of us jumped up out of our seats looking around. All of a sudden my mom started laughing, and once she started it was hard for her to stop. In the end we realized that the organist had fallen asleep...on the organ keyboard. It is a wonder she didn't fall out of the choir loft. Even Father started to laugh. The rest of us sat back down, embarrassed. But I was glad it wasn't the End of the Word.

What a relief. The Lord comes to save us. Filled with joy and even laughter, since a child was born. The Lord did come to save us. Will the lord save us this time? Pope Francis continues, "Jesus points to a strong reminder: "Be vigilant at all times and pray...Prayer is what keeps the lamp of the heart lit. This is especially true when we feel that our enthusiasm has cooled down. Prayer re-lights it, because it brings us back to God, to the center of things. Prayer reawakens the soul from sleep and focuses it on what matters, on the purpose of existence. Even during our busiest day, we must not neglect prayer."

We can't always count on the organist falling asleep during a boring homily to wake us up, because we have to come already eager to hear the word spoken in the gospel, hoping for a message that maybe addressed just to us.

In our *History of the Liturgy* talks that continue today (I'll add a little *trailer* here), we learn that Christmas was not celebrated until the Fourth Century, and Advent wasn't added until the Sixth Century...as a little Lent. That is mainly the reason the color purple or violet was used. The Annunciation was already celebrated very early in the Church on the 25th of March, and counting nine months brings us to the 25th of December, which works out rather nicely astronomically when after the winter solstice the days start becoming longer in the northern hemisphere. It is also not surprising that John the Baptist's birthday is celebrated after the summer solstice when the days are getting shorter, and the saint said, "I must become smaller while he, Jesus, must become greater."

It is during these end days when the days are getting shorter and shorter during winter in the northern hemisphere, that the pagan tribes would become more and more concerned that the sun would disappear and days would stay forever in darkness. (Maybe they should have tried daylight savings time.) The pagans celebrated their festival of lights to encourage the sun to give them longer days. And around the 21st of December, it did, which happens to be the winter solstice. The church celebrated such pagan feasts by incorporating them into our own celebration of Jesus' birth, with the decoration of pine trees ever green and covering them with lit candles. Now we use safer electric lights with color!

We begin the reflection anew with this advent season, beginning with the lighting of the first violet candle, as we await our savior's birth, reflecting on the Incarnation of God become man. Would it have been enough if it all ended there, Jesus' incarnation? Only Easter can tell. Only Divine love can tell us.

Let us begin another Church Year with hope that this time around as we begin another cycle **with** the Lord as we grow closer to each other, both as a parish and as a country, nothing extraordinary, just one candle at a time, supporting each other through our prayers and love.